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Department of State TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL 053

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ACTION EA-18

INFO OCT-01 SS-20 NSC-10 NSCE-00 INR-07 CIAE-00 NSAE-00

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R 141031Z MAY 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4849
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Izabery DATE 1/26/82
RDS☐or XD☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKING: ☐
DECLASSIFIED☑ RELEASABLE☑
RELEASE DENIED☐
FOIA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 7526

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: ALLEGED HARASSMENT OF VICE PRESIDENT KY

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: AIDES OF VICE PRESIDENT CLAIM THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DELIBERATELY TAKING ACTION TO UNDER CUT HIM. EVENTS CITED TO SUPPORT THE ALLEGATIONS CAME IN THE WAKE OF KY'S RECENT SHARP CRITICISM OF THIEU, AND OF REPORTS FROM THE PALACE THAT A RECONCILIATION LEADING TO ANOTHER JOINT ELECTION TICKET IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. SEVERAL AIDES OF VICE PRESIDENT KY (LE VAN THAI, VU DUC VINH, NGUYEN THIEN NHON) HAVE RECENTLY ALLEGED TO US THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD INSTRUCTED THE MEMBERS OF THE CABINET NOT TO INVITE KY TO PUBLIC FUNCTONS ORGANIZED BY THE MINISTRIES WITHOUT CHECKING WITH THE PRIME MINSTER FIRST. VINH AND NHON ALSO ASSERTED THAT ORDERS HAVE GONE OUT TO ALL PROVINCE CHIEFS NOT TO RECEIVE KY OR PROVIDE HIM ANY OF THE FACILITIES A VICE PRESIDENT NORMALLY WOULD RECEIVE.

3. A SCHEDULED APPEARANCE BY KY THE MORNING OF MAY 12

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AT A MEETING OF THE CHINESE SECTION OF THE SOUTHERN (NGUYEN HOA HIEP) VNQDD PARTY WAS APPARENTLY BLOCKED BY POLICE ACTION. NEWS ACCOUNTS STATE THE THEATER OWNER REFUSED TO OPEN THE DOOR, SAYING HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT SECURITY, EVEN THOUGH LARGE NUMBERS OF POLICE AND KY BODYGUARDS WERE IN THE AREA. SOME ACCOUNTS ALSO STATE THE THEATER OWNER RECEIVED A THREATENING PHONE CALL DURING THE NIGHT.

4. AN ASSOCIATE OF HIEP (NGUYEN VAN SA) TOLD US MAY 12 THAT THE POLICE CHIEF OF DISTRICT FIVE OF SAIGON TOLD THE THEATER OWNER NOT TO OPEN THE DOORS. SA ALSO SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD HARASSED THE MEETING BY NOT GRANTING OFFICIAL PERMISSION UNTIL THE DAY BEFORE, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO EXTEND INVITATIONS IN TIME. SA ALLEGED THAT INCIDENT WAS PART OF A DELIBERATE POLICY OF HARASSMENT OF KY BY THE THIEU GOVERNMENT. KY AIDE LE VAN THAI SEPARATELY GAVE US A SIMILAR ACCOUNT.

5. KY'S PAPER, LAP TRUONG, REPORTED THE INCIDENT UNDER A HEADLINE DIRECTLY ACCUSING THIEU OF RESPONSIBILITY. OTHER VERNACULARS MERELY CARRIED THE STORY THAT THE THEATER OWNER HAD BEEN THREATENED, WITHOUT ASSESSING RESPONSIBILITY. IN RECENT MONTHS ISSUES OF LAP TRUONG HAVE BEEN SEIZED MORE AND MORE FREQUENTLY; SEVEN OF THE FIRST 11 ISSUES IN MAY WERE CONFISCATED.

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ORIGIN/ACTION

EA-8

RM/R	REP	AF
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OSD	USIA	NSA
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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POL 14 VIETS (1448)

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A-63 NO. CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING INDICATOR EXDIS

TO : Department of State

INFO : BANGKOK, CINCPAC, DANANG, USDEL FRANCE, VIENTIANE
CINCPAC FOR POLAD

Action assigned to NMR
Action Taken
DATE: May 17, 1971
Date of Action
Action Office Symbol
Name of Officer

FROM : AmEmbassy SAIGON

SUBJECT : Student Attitudes on the Elections

REF :

1. SUMMARY: The forthcoming elections appear to draw from Vietnamese college students both interest and cynicism, reflecting disillusion with the present leadership and political situation of Vietnam. Most students oppose President Thieu -- even though his accomplishments are recognized -- and profess to doubt that he will permit a fair election. General Minh has basic appeal as a man of virtue, although students also often question Minh's capacity to provide strong leadership. Ky draws only limited support. The militants (exploited to a degree by the Communists) will undoubtedly try to propagandize and demonstrate in the context of the elections, but will probably be kept closely circumscribed by the authorities. The interest of the moderate students in the elections is unlikely to be translated into campaign activities in behalf of candidates, with the probable exception of Buddhist and Catholic student organizations. END SUMMARY.

2. Basic attitudes. Vietnam's approximately 50,000 university students are an elite and privileged class. They are generally from well-to-do middle and upper class families and have usually been shielded from the deprivations suffered by others in the country. They have received the prized "Baccalaureate II" (the approximate equivalent of an American high school diploma) and are eligible for continued deferment from military service while they remain enrolled in the university.

3. A variety of pressures, however, awaits the student who gains entrance to the university. He must cope with crowded and antiquated facilities and instruction of generally poor quality. He faces military service upon graduation, or earlier if he fails his exams. From outside the university come attempts by the government, the Communists, political parties, and others to recruit students to serve their own

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Clearances: POL:JSylvester

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ends. Always present is the war and its many attendant problems.

4. In the face of these realities student attitudes and actions are shaped by both self-interest and idealism. There is often intense desire to avoid the draft as long as possible and enjoy life before being caught by military service. Yet Vietnamese college students share much of the idealism of their contemporaries around the world, and the major concern of their generation -- Vietnam -- is of course an even more immediate problem to them.

5. Attitudes of politically sensitive students toward the election process are strongly conditioned by widespread student dissatisfaction and disillusion with present events and leadership in Vietnam. The war has gone on for twenty-five years but seems to them no closer to resolution. Corruption continues to flourish, while the economic situation, particularly for urban dwellers, is thought to have deteriorated in recent years. But the greatest source of disillusion for students is what they feel to be the absence of spiritual and moral leadership in the country. The idealists fervently believe that only when Vietnam finds leaders who are virtuous (co duc) and who command the respect of the people will the GVN be able to truly claim the "just cause" (chinh nghia). Such disenchantment is the starting point for many students when they begin to form their views of the coming elections.

6. Views of the Electoral Process. Among students, debate over the fairness of the upcoming elections is likely to be as intense as debate concerning candidates and issues. There are already frequent charges that elections in Vietnam are meaningless because they are organized by President Thieu and his supporters. The more militant students press this line of reasoning and claim the constitution is a facade which allows the armed forces to retain a controlling influence over the country.

7. Moderate students, however, do generally subscribe to the present constitutional system. It is recognized as still imperfect, but there is also hope that over time it can be improved. Many students welcomed as a sign of fairness the elimination from the presidential election bill of the requirement that candidates be endorsed by members of the National Assembly or by provincial councilmen. Nonetheless, many of these students from time to time also express doubts about the honesty of the electoral process. While most would not term earlier elections in Vietnam as outright frauds, many tend to share the militants' belief that President Thieu, holding the reins of power, stands little chance of being defeated in the forthcoming presidential race.

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8. Lower House Elections. Students generally hold little esteem for their representatives in the National Assembly. Deputies and Senators are usually seen to be interested more in their personal business than in their constituents, and recent revelations of smuggling by Lower House members have reinforced this attitude. In student circles one often hears that corruption in the Lower House has become so blatant that no more than a handful of the present deputies deserve to gain reelection on Aug[illegible] 29. At the same time there tends to be considerable doubt that the new deputies will be any more honest or less corrupt than their predecessors.

9. Between now and August there is unlikely to be a significiant upsurge of Saigon student interest in Lower House elections. In contrast to most other political elements, students have fixed their attention on the presidential campaign and are interested in the earlier election primarily as a bellwether of how honest the presidential race may be.

10. Presidential Election. Students share the general view that the only serious contenders are President Thieu, Vice President Ky, and Duong Van Minh. However, all three candidates, as former generals, are viewed by many students as representatives of the military establishment. The ele tion of any one of them will be interpreted as a continuation of predominant military control, rather than a shift toward truly civilian government.

11. President Thieu generally excites little enthusiasm, even among moderate students. Some recognize the gains in security under Thieu, but decry what they consider the lack of progress in solving the economic and social problems facing the country. Thieu's reelection would be seen as bringing a continuation of policies pursued during his first term. Generally, moderate students endorse Thieu's refusal to enter into a coalition government with the Communists as well as his rejection of a settlement which would lead to North Vietnamese control of the South. However, many of these same students tend to believe that Thieu's policy in dealing with the other side is too hard and rigid. They often suggest that a more flexible stand might more quickly lead to a reconciliation with the North while at the same time preserving the independence of the South.

12. Among the militant students President Thieu is anathema, for to them he symbolizes everything which they see, or claim to see, as wrong

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in Vietnam. They portray him as an American puppet who continues to prosecute the war at the bidding of the Americans. Most of these students fervently desire an end to the war and reason that the departure of Thieu as president would hasten the withdrawal of Americans and in turn lead to an early peace. This peace, so the argument goes, could be arranged directly between the North and the South without the interference of any outside forces. Even the anti-Communists among the militants tend to believe the presence of the United States inhibits a resolution of the conflict.

13. While the views of the moderates and militants diverge on the question of Vietnam's political future, their views coincide in condemnation of Thieu's apparent unwillingness to take vigorous measures to eliminate corruption in government. The lack of what they feel is virtuous leadership is creating a generation of students cynical of government and contemptuous of the greed and self-interest which they see around them.

14. Students in general believe the government has failed to adopt a constructive policy toward students. Present policy is seen as aimed at keeping student ranks divided and students under control, rather than attempting to establish a constructive dialogue with them. Anger is expressed over frequent police intrusions onto the campus to break up even non-political student meetings. The government has earned particularly severe condemnation for arrest and detention of students.

15. Duong Van Minh's predominant image among students is that of a man who would like to run for president, but who has no program other than vague opposition to Thieu. The ambiguity of Minh's public position has confused many students and left them wondering what he stands for, although his image as a virtuous man has appeal. Those students who believe Vietnam needs a strong leader, however, usually feel that Minh would not be the one to provide such leadership. Perhaps Minh's greatest asset with students is his apparent independence of the United States, thus leading many students to believe Minh's election might make it easier to settle the war "by allowing Vietnamese to work things out among themselves" -- a concept widely held among students.

16. Minh's candidacy finds some support among the radical students, primarily because he represents an alternative to President Thieu. The fact that little seems to be known about Minh's views is troublesome even to these students, but their dislike for Thieu leads them to support Minh.

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17. Should Ky decide to run, he is likely to find only scattered student support. He is generally regarded as an "also ran" who has been skillfully out-maneuvered by Thieu. His image is often that of an outspoken, swashbuckling, air force pilot who might be a good military commander but hardly a serious leader of his country. However, those who do support Ky point precisely to this outgoing manner -- in such contrast to Thieu's political style -- as the type of vigorous, active leadership the country needs. For many other students, Ky suffers the same deficiency as Thieu in symbolizing the power of the military and epitomizing the faults of the present administration.

18. Student Activities during the Election Campaign. While there is substantial political interest and awareness among students, it is unlikely to be translated into significant campaign support for candidates. Few students have the experience or have been educated to believe that their efforts have any meaningful role in the election process, and they only seldom think in such American terms as putting up campaign posters, handing out leaflets, making speeches, etc. There also tends to be profound discouragement over the enormity of the country's problems that many students have concluded their efforts are likely to be wasted.

19. Also discouraging student involvement is the charge that President Thieu will arrange his own reelection, thus rendering student efforts meaningless. A similar line of reasoning involves the Americans. Since the United States is often credited with making most political decisions in Vietnam, some students argue that their actions have no influence because, in their view, the U.S. has already committed itself to Thieu.

20. Militant students, particularly those associated with the Saigon Student Union, are promoting student non-involvement. At present, they argue that students should stand as an independent force, not taking sides and not assisting in the campaigning. They say that students thus become the conscience of the society by protesting dishonest election practices, exposing candidates unfit for office, etc. However, the militants may change later to active campaigning against Thieu.

21. Despite the general student negativism on the election, many students individually and in organized groups, can be expected to

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participate in the campaign. The Buddhist Student Association in Saigon and the Buddhist students at the University of Hue will be rallied to support candidates favored by the An Quang church. In the same vein, the Catholic Student Association will most likely follow the lead of the Catholic church.

22. The Communists may also attempt to manipulate the militants to discredit and hamper the election process. The VC have long attempted to penetrate and exploit student groups, and recent statements by Hanoi and the NLF have again stressed the importance of students as a shock force for revolutionary activity in the urban areas. Intelligence reports have identified some of the present leadership of the Saigon Students Union as members of the Peoples Revolutionary Party, although the information has not been firm enough to justify arrests. We judge, however, that the main impetus for student militancy is not Communist direction but the radicalism of youth that is common now to countries around the world. In the absence of unfortunate incidents, we believe the Communists will not be able to exploit the student movement to interfere significantly with the election.

23. Through a mixture of force and concessions, the government during the last year has been successful in keeping the activities of militant students restricted to a level not dangerous to political stability. Prime Minister Khiem recently met with militant leaders, and positively met some of their requests in an effort to show the government wished to be reasonable. In the coming election period we expect the authorities will watch carefully the activities of the radical student leaders but will attempt to avoid repressive actions that might lead students to mount protest demonstrations.

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